

## Typography and Education

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### Macro Letters

An experimental lettering workshop

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**Abstract:** Like writing, lettering is one of a kind creation designed for a specific application.

It is been observed and analyzed that Lettering is prominently being in order with its traditional set form and customs, derived and developed by several lettering artist across various periods & various countries. Considering modern age of a design domain, there are mere possibilities available or more can researched out in which lettering can mould to its extremity and can open up new dimension and customs.

By taking this core germ, the 'Macro letters' workshop was planned and conceptualized for design students, in order to experiment an adaptation methodology through which various lettering possibilities can be planned out for several design implementations.

The significance of this experimental lettering workshop was to propagate an adaptation theory through which innovative letterform development can be possible which can initiate 'a new thinking approach' towards the lettering aspect

**Key words:** *Lettering, forms and customs, adaptation methodology, lettering possibilities, experiments, innovative letterform development, new lettering approach*

## 1. Introduction

Like writing, lettering is one of a kind creation designed for a specific application. Lettering differs from handwriting in that its main focus is usually on technique and visual appearance. It has been custom-tailored by taking every letter and co-related space in order to get desired visual form. Ranges from the earliest pictographs and hieroglyphics to the work of 20th-century designers, It is an act, process or art of forming letter.

If the word calligraphy refers to direct writing, the term lettering usually refers to drawn, built-up or retouched forms. Logos, headlines and most works for reproduction fit this category. After many rough sketches are made, a magazine headline or logo may be freely executed in pure calligraphic strokes. Then it usually needs to be carefully modified so that all of the elements balance and everything will reproduce well. Built-up forms can be understood as a kind of additive sculpture, where a form thickens up over an armature until the designer's conception is achieved. The term lettering may also be used to cover every kind of letter-making, including calligraphy, drawn lettering, monumental letter carving, typeface design, and so on. (With ref. Calligraphy, lettering & typeface design, Julien waters)

### **An overview:**

Considering letterer's work from western culture and their development, there is different significance or remarkable change is seen in terms of various styles of lettering as these various styles do have a very rigid base of several different invented hands within majuscule and minuscule. These hands are namely Carolingian, rotunda, uncial, half uncial, pointed flex, foundational, chancery and so on. Because of such base of several hands, creating lettering by taking these existing letter shapes into consideration therefore becomes an easiest and convenient exercise for any letterer or lettering artist. Within such practice, besides the letter drawing, an artist can elevate or beautify the existing letter style by bringing several different applications into it. These applications can be any different drawing, doodling and drill or painting technique or even could be any existin or

self made process, through which lettering can get a whole new visual



face.

Figure 1

Considering lettering work within devnagari script, Ranges from the earliest pictographs and hieroglyphics to the work of 20th-century designers, lettering has seen its wide development upto some extent in which it has differ from the ancient script carvings on various metal surfaces and on stone engravings to beautifully crafted monuments and their surfaces. In a modern age of design or where letter applications are concerns, lettering has got its new dimension within monogram design, logo design, title design, illustrated lettering, graffiti, emblem design and so on.

In an earlier era, sign board paintings or hand painted lettering was one of the interesting 'lettering culture' India has ever seen. This was considered as commercial application of lettering on a huge and a bigger scale done within public domain. Street walls, film posters, vehicle plates, shops banners were some of the outputs of such letterings.



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4

When the print media has got explored much in public domain, lettering has acquired its coverage within several print outlets ranges from newspaper to various magazines, books and publications. Lettering artist had showcased their lettering variability within such publication and lettering has got a new customized look derivatives with several different logos, title designs upto headings for various contents and stories.



Figure 5



Figure 6

### Perception:

By looking at the work done by several different lettering artists from India, lettering is predominantly done by taking a typographic and or calligraphic base into consideration. This help in structuring the lettering unit that artist needs to depart for some certain communication. Though Calligraphy is a direct and one touched process, after making any calligraphic rendering, an artist can retouched an entire calligraphed unit and can balance it by adding several different weights to it. Lettering also sometime help in getting a different kind of a texture or it even can give a different visual treatment to whatever is been done or crafted before.

Considering the lettering culture which is been evolved in the country as of now, is a byproduct of whatever is been done. Right from the old age (an era of historic monuments or stone carved culture) whatever several people i.e. lettering artist are doing, is with their own perception and the way they had perceived lettering. Art is always gets generate and developed with the flow of different cultures exist in the country and with people of different perception and choice. By extracting the same germ, Lettering had got its own shape and conventions the way various artists' were practicing this particular art for a longer period and so the several outputs which we are seeing about this particular art, those are somewhere connected with each other as the receiver (audience) too has a particular demand about it.

Considering 'mass psychology', whenever a particular culture exists around people, they often tend to react likewise. Which means people measurly love to have something which can go parallel with their likes, choice and convenience. This choice gets evolved with the current need of the respective time and trend. The way people demand for something,

measurly an applied artist needs to give response with their work likewise.' Unknowingly - knowingly' such 'give and take' sets the structure of any particular art for some period and because of what art gets re-invented or re-shaped with some certain conventions. Lettering too has got such structure which people have seen for a very longer period.



Figure 7



Figure 8

When the subject lettering had got its place in a curriculum or in an academia, it was a need of having its syllabic structure or range of methods so that students of design or visual art can perceive the subject systematically and can research out new experiments with the same for further design implementation.

#### **Current status:**

It is been observed and analyzed from various existing lettering artist, letterer-designer's work and parallel research, that lettering is prominently being in order with its traditional set form and customs, derived and developed by several lettering artist across various periods & various countries. Considering modern age of a design domain, there are mere

possibilities available or more can researched out in which lettering can mould to its extremity and can open up new dimension and customs.

Specifying the lettering work in design domain that happening around, is moreover binding its limitation to several medium explorations either or with various processing's and existing decorative styles. Within this, lettering is getting bound with a personal touch or remaining with a personal craft-skill and hence falling into limitations to deliver a definite work process to new learners for various letterforms creations & innovative visual possibilities.

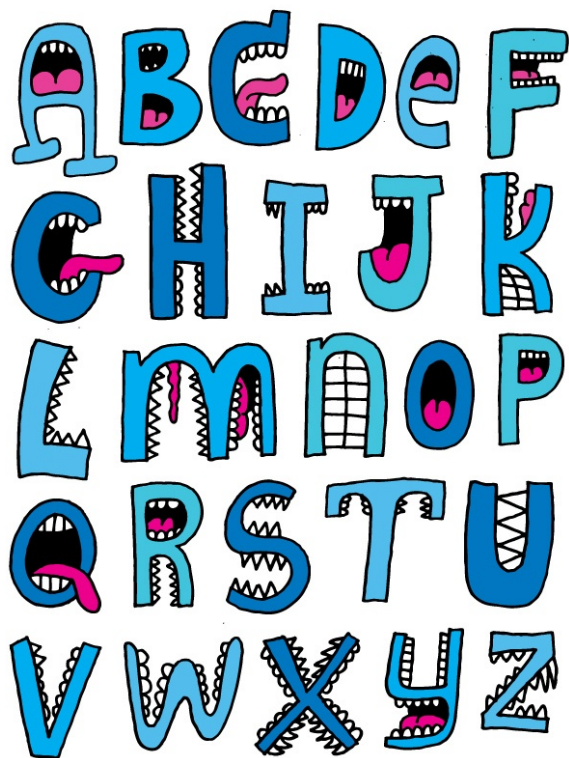


Figure 9



Figure 10

#### Observations and analysis:

Elaborating whichever is mentioned in above para. Is Lettering deals with letterform i.e. with any particular script. within this the way lettering has been seen so far, students tend to create exercises by taking inspiration from the same and even many educators work with the treatment process which lettering concerns with, it even includes several processing like, letter crafting, letter molding, letter engraving, letter embossing, letter cuts, to various cut paste methods with different materials. Within such process letterings gets new visual face because of getting a different treatment and measurly students gets tied up and gets stick with the same process whenever they need to create lettering for any purpose. It is because sometimes the reasoning for a particular lettering is not being practiced with students.

Other than this, from various works which are available, lettering is also perceived as retouching and reshaping the existence letters in which students are generously randomly create any one touched lettering unit (a calligraphed piece of letters) and then create an illustrative unit by retouching several different organs of letterform. Though it looks beautiful, doesn't necessary that students need to apply such method whenever there will



be a requirement of any lettering art. As a negative part of this process, students also come out with one of the perception of lettering as 'lettering is reshaping or making the drawing in order to make the available space beautiful or ornamental'. Because of such perception, we always see a beautifully crafted or elevated letter unit in which the letterforms doesn't well treated with difference but the space is.

Within a study of any letter- design related discipline, the core important part is a letter 'form'. Unless one pays attention to it and if measurly getting engaged with rest of the treatment within a lettering, the output of lettering gets similar face and more often it deliver the same aesthetics besides some structural change. Lettering is an act of process encompasses different treatments handles with various materials but besides that it is an art of making letter and shaping letters which unveils the truth of developing the letter as a form also, which we all often forget and as a result lettering gets bound with treating existing lettering style or personal style of creating letters and then illustrating them.

#### **Problems and difficulties:**

When it comes to reshaping the existing lettering style, one touched written letters, or one touches drawing, i.e. 'calligraphy' comes in to the picture. While studying the subject calligraphy in the academics, especially Devnagari, we get to introduced with a **Balbodhi hand** (Basic style) which was as usually seen, an only single existing hand which generally we learn in the academic. While in comparison about learning Roman script calligraphy, we generally get to introduced with myriad roman hands such as Foundational hand, Corolingian, chancery, humanistic, Rustica, Roman Uncial, Half Uncial, Rotunda, Gothic etc. This in result left a so much of a scope for Roman lettering in terms of its exploration by taking as many letters style which are available.

Within the devnagari context, by taking overview from the past study, have enlisted some sort of research that has been done from epigraphist like George Buehler, Gauri Shankar Ojha, A.B.Walawalkar, Lipikar Wakankar & others in terms of Morphology of letterforms. (Ref. Contribution of Inscriptional writing to the development of typography, Caltis 83) even with that, the epigraphic models which were based on the traditional scripts, designed & conceptualized by Prof. R.K.Joshi. Were the few examples & research which

happened parallel in the calligraphic domain with certain logics & disciplines because of which we had received some fundamentals of creating new styles of devanagari letters others than creating style with personal skills.

This further also creates a limitation for new learners in order to get different letterforms for further treatments and design implementations. Analyzing current lettering teaching and practice of it, it is a humble observation amongst several lettering practitioner and students and even tutors, that the overall lettering practicing and teaching is limited with methodologies and sensitivity in order to implant variables of letterings within students mind. Making a segregation of lettering and its methods is therefore become an immense need for innovative lettering outcome. This could help students to perceive lettering from a different angle.

#### **An approach:**

By taking this core germ, the 'Macro letters' workshop was planned and conceptualized for design students, in order to experiment an 'adaptation methodology' through which various lettering possibilities can be planned out for several design implementations. The research method had demonstrated various thought processing's, visual literacy, form development and its understanding amongst the students.

Adaptation means conversion or transformation from one source to another one for further proceedings. 'Macro means anything which expands into something larger', the lateral meaning behind the word was, to look into the thing in a very detail manner in order to adapt micro things out of it and bringing them on 'macro level' which means on a very clear level, definite level in order to understand its form and its structure for further improvisation.

The content of the workshop started with basics of lettering, its overall process referencing with several work done from eminent lettering practitioner followed by discussion and interaction about overall lettering approach and its problems and practical difficulties.

Some of the practical queries are as followed:

- 1) Even if students see's the work done so far , and though they find them very illustrative and eye pleasing, they do not come to know in which way they need to order their layout and fill the given space by upbringing a particular form onto it.
- 2) Using an existing letter style and reshaping it, students doesn't relate to it in order to come out with some new understanding about what they are doing.
- 3) Students need to know in what way they can develop new letterform by using lettering principal's i.e. through drawing
- 4) Students who are uncomfortable in creating calligraphy (with one touched process) and finding themselves better and convenient with lettering process, cannot come out with elegant appearance of letterform through lettering as the gets with calligraphy. So they seek for some method through which they can initiate letter drawing with difference.
- 5) Making a pattern or doodling within the letterform, sometime appear irrelevant to students. They are looking forward to implement or draw those patterns which make some sense to the overall process of designing letterform.

### Processing:

By over viewing these queries, the workshop got started with a demonstration followed by an exercise of letter development which can be utilized later for lettering visuals. For making an adaptation simpler on primary level, some definite source, material was required which can be handled easily by the entire student and even which will easy for observation. Hence the chosen materials for the exercise were 'vegetables'.

The demonstration initiates with dissection of several vegetables and chopping them into various shapes for further observations. Students had observed minute details placed within the vegetables and made various drawings of seen particles. By making these particles more simpler and narrowing those down, students had made several visuals of the particles

and inner s they have dissected and simplified, turning into identical letter tructure of vegetables anatomy. By simplifying each visual on possible level and tried structuring them into an identical pattern, students

had started shaping up 'letter skeletons and forms' out of the form visuals.



Figure 11

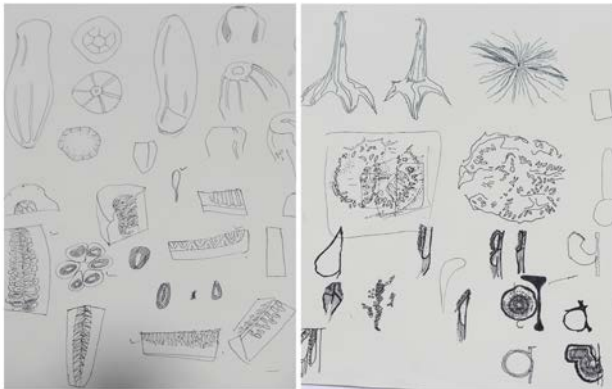


Figure 12



Figure 13

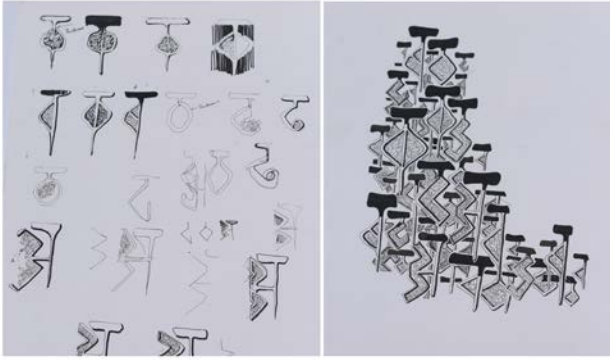


Figure 14

For placing the letterforms, students had developed various existing structure of vegetables and their dissected parts which they had used later on as a base for making several compositions.

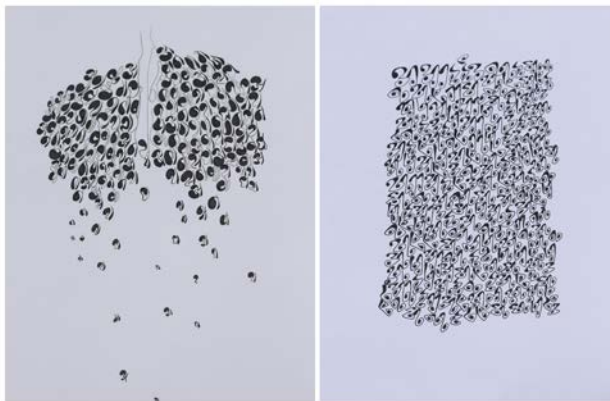


Figure15

### Conclusion:

Some of the observation and analysis students had made regarding the entire planned exercise were:

- 1) The material which had been provided to them was a surprising one had helped them for being one with the given source as it was never handled in similar way before.

- 2) The overall dissection exercise was fruitful in order to develop their attention span for a longer time and even increasing their observational ability to the core.
- 3) Developing some identical form out of vague structure was a challenging task and hence it had appeared as a visual literacy process also.
- 4) Deriving letterform structure had even built up visual development ability and shaping the letters into an identical one was an eye opener task to create any innovative letterform likewise.
- 5) Composing the entire unit had a planned method and hence there was a linked up in uplifting used shape for making the composition different and innovative.
- 6) Other than what so ever had been seen by students, this lettering exercise was very much new for them in order to illustrate creative letter form which has some meaningful, logical and studied background of process.

Other than what is been done so far or whatever is happening around in lettering domain, There are infinite ways through which one can learn lettering aspect differently or even there are many ways through which one can teach lettering aspect in order to initiate something new but making students learn 'sensitivity and sensibility' along with what they are doing and giving them 'reasoning and logical background', makes the difference in their understanding which can take them up towards new concept of the same subject they have studied and introduced with.

The significance of this experimental lettering workshop was to propagate an adaptation theory with simplified demonstrated method through which innovative letterform development can be possible which can initiate 'a new thinking approach' towards the lettering aspect and can serve a 'definite structure or method for parallel experiments' in design domain.

#### **Acknowledgement (if any)**

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